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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to replicate (with improvements) some early research that attempted to identify significant predictors of communication apprehension. It was hypothesized that the dimensions of homophily, attraction, and situational self-esteem would be significant predictors of situational apprehension in the acquaintance context of relationships. An analysis of survey data from 261 college students revealed that situational self-esteem, physical attraction, and attitude homophily were significant predictors of apprehension. Taken together, the findings suggest that during the early stages of relationships people make a number of perceptions and experience feelings of self-esteem that predict the amount of communication apprehension they will experience in a given situation. (Tables of statistical data and a copy of instruments used in the study are appended.) (FL)

HOMOPHILY, ATTRACTION, AND SELF-ESTEEM AS PREDICTORS OF SITUATIONAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN THE ACQUAINTANCE CONTEXT

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Abstract

A large number of studies have been conducted to investigate the nature and impact of trait communication apprehension. Recent research has begun to examine the state (or situational) manifestation of communication apprehension. The purpose of this study was to replicate with improvements some early research attempting to identify significant predictors of communication apprehension when considered a state variable. It was hypothesized that dimensions of homophily, attraction, and situational self-esteem would be significant predictors of situational apprehension in the acquaintance context of relationships. A survey of 261 college students was analyzed via multiple regression. Results indicated that situational self-esteem, physical attraction, and attitude homophily were significant predictors of apprehension. Discussion concerned possible explanations for the dimensions which did not enter the model as well as some conceptual indications and methodological qualifications.

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HOMOPHILY, ATTRACTION, AND SELF-ESTEEM AS PREDICTORS OF SITUATIONAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION IN THE ACQUAINTANCE CONTEXT

A number of recent investigations have been conducted to examine the notion of situational communication apprehension. While a large body of research has established the nature and impact of the trait aspect of communication apprehension (CA), relatively little research has been concerned with situational communication apprehension (SCA). While CA affects only some people, SCA conceptually may impact a large percentage of the population, given the appropriate circumstances. That is, regardless of the level of trait CA, individuals may find some situations more apprehensive than others. Richmond (1978) has speculated that some relationships may exist between the two types of apprehension. Thus, a person with high trait CA will find many more situations to be threatening than will the low CA person.

McCroskey (1977) reviewed the research and concluded that trait CA forces the individual to withdraw from and avoid communication, resulting in unfavorable perceptions by others. It should be expected that state communication apprehension would have similar (relationship-specific) effects. Initial research into this area has attempted to identify predictors and correates of SCA. If some relationships stimulate more apprehension than others, what factors help explain this difference? One of the first studies in this area (Snavely, Merker, Becker & Book, 1976) focused on the acquaintance stage of relationships and concluded that social attraction, background homophily, and self-esteem were predictive of state apprehension. That is, individuals in their study were less apprehensive when the acquaintance was socially attractive and of a similar background, and when they felt a higher level of self-esteem. Richmond (1978)

also found that state CA was related to attraction and peer credibility. The goal of this study was to replicate the efforts of Snavely, et.al. (1976), employing different measurement and analysis techniques, a different subject pool, and additional predictors.

Homophily/Similarity

Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) concluded that when a person has the option of interacting with any one of a number of different others, there is a strong tendency for the person to select another who is similar (or homophilous). Having selected the homophilous other, the amount and depth of interaction increases which tends to create greater consensus and homophily between them. Since communication apprehension is related to amount and depth of interaction, there is reason to expect that homophily would be predictive of situational apprehension. This relationship between homophily and interaction was supported by Homans (1950) and Wheeless (1973). Rogers and Bhowmik (1970) concluded that when greater homophily is present, communication is also likely to be more effective. Snavely, et.al. (1976) found specifically that the background dimension of homophily was predictive of situational apprehension. In their review of the homophily literature, McCroskey and Richmond (1979) concluded that there are two significant dimensions of homophily: background and attitude. This literature suggests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Attitude and/or background homophily will be significant predictors of situational communication apprehension in the acquaintance context.

Attraction

Snavely, et.al. (1976) found liking (or social attraction) to be a significant predictor of SCA among acquaintances. The work of Berger and

Calabrese (1975) suggests that liking is negatively related to uncertainty. In turn, the reduction of uncertainty through communication leads to even greater social attraction. Lallju and Cook (1973) found in part that as communication between people increases, the uncertainty between them decreases and vice versa. Thus, in those cases where apprehension is high and their communication level is low, uncertainty should be high, leading to lower perceptions of social attraction. As people see one another as more attractive, communication apprehension should lessen, the amount of communication should thus increase, leading to reduction of uncertainty. Several investigations have supported a relationship between liking and amount of communication (c.f. Sermat and Smyth, 1973; Shaw, 1971).

McCroskey and McCain (1975) and McCroskey and Richmond (1979) have supported a multidimensional view of attraction. In addition to social attraction, people make perceptions of task attraction and physical attraction. While little research is directly supportive of a link between these dimensions and apprehension, it seems reasonable to expect some tie. Those we find task attractive would seem more approachable than the reverse, at least in task-relevant situations, and approachability is conceptually quite close to the notion of situational communication apprehension. The relationship between physical attraction and apprehension remains an empirical question. Among acquaintances, an early stage in relationship development, physical attraction can be a major determinant of initial contact and continued interaction. Thus, the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Social, Physical and/or Task Attraction will be significant predictors of situational communication apprehension in the acquaintance context.

Self-Esteem

A number of studies (Fitts, 1972; Branden, 1969; Gergen, 1971; Kwal and Freshler, 1973) have established that self-esteem is a central and critical variable in human behavior. Fitts suggested that it is perhaps the most essential element of interpersonal communication. The specific relationship between communication apprehension and self-esteem is also well established (c.f. McCroskey, 1977). Ferullo (1963) found that low esteem speakers reacted to the speaking situation with tension, strain, or anxiety. Both Hare (1962) and Kwal and Freshler (1973) demonstrated that in group situations high self-esteem was positively related to amount of communication. While Snavely, et.al. (1976) found self-esteem to be significantly predictive of situational apprehension, their findings were problematic, since a non-situational measure was utilized. Based on this body of research, the following hypothesis can be suggested:

Hypothesis 3: Situational Self-Esteem will be a significant predictor of situational communication apprehension in the acquaintance context.

As noted above, measurement in the Snavely, et.al. (1976) study was somewhat problematic. The present investigation attempts to replicate those efforts, including more dimensions of attraction and refined measurement and analysis techniques. The following section describes some of the measurement issues.

Measurement

While the measurement of trait CA can be accomplished with a reliable and valid measure, the PRCA (McCroskey, 1977), state CA has only recently been operationalized in the literature. Snavely, et.al. (1977) devised their own measure (MICA). Their three items achieved a Cronbach Alpha of

.750; however, the authors encountered some validity problems and called for a revised measure. Richmond (1978) operationalized state CA via the Spielberger (1966) State-Trait Anxiety Inventory. This scale tapped general state anxiety rather than apprehension about interpersonal communication. Snavely and Phelps (1979) developed new scales to tap this phenomenon. Their situational communication apprehension measure (SCAM) exhibited predictive and face validity and achieved an average reliability of .81 (.809 - .811). A subsequent investigation (Fairhurst and Snavely, 1980) found the reliability of SCAM in their study to be .92 and further established predictive validity.

Only one dimension of attraction (social attraction) was examined by Snavely and his associates. The measure utilized (Sullivan, Garrison, & Merker, 1975) achieved a reliability of .822 but has not been properly reported or utilized since. McCroskey and Richmond (1979) examined the reliability and validity of the most commonly used attraction scales (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). While the measures were found to be moderately reliable, new measures were developed to increase reliability. In their study, McCroskey and Richmond found a reliability of .95 - .96 for task attraction and for physical attraction. The validity of the social attraction dimension was addressed by Snavely and Collier (1979) who developed new scales for social attraction which were appropriate for relationships that are past the stranger stage and which achieved face validity. Reliability of the Snavely and Collier measure was .93.

Homophily has been measured in recent years via scales by McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975). These scales were utilized in the Snavely et al. (1976) study, resulting in reliabilities of .86, .70, and .61 for the attitude, background, and value dimensions, respectively.

McCroskey and Richmond (1979) also revised these measures, both conceptually and operationally. Two dimensions of homophily were measured: background (Alpha = .81 - .84) and attitude (Alpha = .92 - .95).

Self-esteem measurement was especially problematic for Snavely et al. (1976) since they used a generalized measure of self-esteem rather than a situational measure. At this time, however, there does not appear to be a reliable or valid measure of situational self-esteem available.

Analysis

One of the problems with the Snavely et al. study was data analysis. The 3-item MICA was split in order to form 2 groups, high and low apprehension. The predictors were then measured and analyzed through discriminant analysis. While their rationale for doing so may have been conceptually reasonable, a great deal of variance was lost through artificial dichotomization of the apprehension data. Regression would probably have been more appropriate to allow for prediction of actual variance in situational communication apprehension.

Method

Subjects. This study was conducted during the fall of 1979 in a midwestern state university in two basic speech communication courses. Appendix A provides demographic data relative to the 261 student subjects. Most subjects were 19 - 20 years old, either sophomores or juniors, and were about 47% male, 53% female.

Administration of Research. A questionnaire was administered during regular class periods. Each subject was given a definition of an acquaintance and asked to specifically choose one acquaintance, write that person's first name on the answer sheet, and to respond to the

scales which followed with that relationship in mind. An acquaintance was defined as "someone you know, but would not consider a close friend. While you may or may not like this person, he or she is not yet a close friend in whom you would confide." The items for each of the scales were randomly selected for order, comprising a 79-item battery, followed by five demographic questions.

Operational Definitions. Aside from self-esteem, the scales to measure each of the variables in this study were discussed in a previous section of the paper. Since no scales for situational self-esteem were found, a number of potential scale items were generated by the researchers and adapted from a non-situational measure, the Janis-Field feelings of inadequacy scale (Robinson & Shaver, 1973). A factor analysis was performed on the resulting data which suggested a 7-item measure (Appendix B). Factor analyses on all other scales were also performed, resulting in the elimination of some of the items for each of the variables in the study.

Statistical Design. The hypotheses were tested via a multiple regression where situational apprehension (SCAM) was the dependent variable and the predictor variables were attitude similarity (ATTSIM), background similarity (BACKSIM), self-esteem (ESTEEM), task attraction (TASKATR), physical attraction (PHYATR), and social attraction (SOCATR). Prior to their entry into the regression model, it was determined that the intercorrelations among the predictors be checked for multicollinearity (Table 1). The results indicated that social attraction should not enter the model, since it was highly correlated with attitude similarity (.72) and physical attraction (.51).

Insert Table 1 about here

Secondly, it was determined that all variables must achieve acceptable internal reliability in order to be entered into the analysis. An examination of Table 2 reveals that all variables ware reliable as measured by Cronbach's standardized item Alpha via SPSS.

Insert Table 2 about here

Results

The initial regression analysis (via SPSS) was performed with 5 predictors, since social attraction was eliminated due to multicollinearity. The results (Table 3) suggested that two of the variables (background similarity and task atrraction) were not significant predictors and should be dropped from the model.

Insert Table 3 about here

A re-analysis with three predictors was then performed. As indicated by Table 4, the strongest predictor (F = 165.207) was situational self-esteem, followed by physical attraction (F = 22.641) and attitude similarity (F = 5.530).

Insert Table 4 about here

The entire model was significant, as indicated by the analysis of variance summary in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

Discussion

The original goal of this investigation was to replicate (with modifications) the efforts of Snavely et al. (1976) to specify the predictors of situational communication apprehension (SCA). Of the three predictors in that study, only one (self-esteem) was a significant predictor in this investigation. Because of measurement improvements and more appropriate statistical treatment, the authors of this study feel more confident with the present results.

The first hypothesis posited that dimensions of homophily would be significant predictors of SCA in this study. While the background dimension was not significant, attitude similarity did emerge as a significant predictor in the model. This should not suggest that background similarity is unrelated to SCA, however. For heuristic purposes, an analysis was run substituting background for attitude similarity. The results were nearly identical, with the background beta significant in the model with self-esteem and physical attraction ($F = 3.879$). However, since background homophily did not enter the overall model, it appears that, given information about attitude similarity, the additional contribution of background similarity is insignificant.

The second hypothesis posited that dimensions of attraction would be significant predictors of SCA. Results indicated that one dimension of attraction (physical) was a strong predictor while task was not. Social attraction was eliminated due to multicollinearity with other predictors. Explanation for the failure of task attraction to predict SCA can be found in the fact that this study did not involve a task-relevant situation. It is possible that in co-worker relationships

task attraction would be more relevant and thus perhaps predictive of SCA. This remains an empirical question. Social attraction was highly correlated with both attitude similarity and physical attraction. When entered in a regression model with self-esteem only, social attraction is non-significant ($F = 0.344$). This finding contradicts the results of Snavely et al. (1976). Aside from scaling, one relevant difference between the two studies was the population sampled. While the earlier study used people from a church group, this investigation used a sample of college students. It may be that these people reacted differently. In any case, further investigation seems warranted given the strong conceptual link in the literature.

The third hypothesis posited that situational self-esteem would be a significant predictor of SCA. A major improvement over the previous study was that a situational measure was utilized in this investigation. The results confirmed previous research, both in the areas of trait and state communication apprehension, that self-esteem is a very strong predictor of apprehension. The R^2 for self-esteem was .39, while physical attraction added .04 and attitude similarity added .01.

When taken together, these findings suggest that during early stages of relationships, people make a number of perceptions and experience feelings of self-esteem which predict the amount of communication apprehension they will experience in a given situation. Examination of the beta weights would indicate that when our self-esteem is high and we perceive the other person to be less physically attractive and to hold similar attitudes, we will have low apprehension. While only 16% of the variance in apprehension was explained by Snavely et al. (1976), this

combination of variables explained 43% of the variance in SCA for these subjects.

Some qualifications are in order when considering these results. The first is generalizability. The subject pool was quite homogenous, suggesting that generalizability be limited to college sophomores. Future research should, beyond simple replication, also employ other population samples. Secondly, it should be remembered that this effort represents the indications of preliminary research in this area, not final conclusions. Finally, it should be noted that some of the measures used contained too many items. Some of the subjects complained of the length of the questionnaire (84 questions) and factor analyses could not support the use of all items. (The final SCAM dimension used included some items generated by the researchers which loaded well in factor analysis. Appendix C lists those items.) Future research should consider subject fatigue in multivariate research and trim scales down to the best 5 - 10 items. This applies especially to similarity and attraction scales (McCroskey and Richmond, 1979). Background similarity had 10 items, 3 of which loaded; attitude similarity had 17 items, 7 of which loaded; physical attraction had 12 items, 8 of which loaded; task attraction had 14 items, 10 of which loaded; and Snavely and Collier's (1979) social attraction measure had 10 items, 6 of which loaded highly in this study.

Snavely and his associates concluded that research with a revised situational communication apprehension measure would hold great promise for interpersonal communication theory and research. The present authors, using such a measure, agree. It is probable that SCA affects

people on a daily basis and certainly has ramifications for a number of relevant communication variables such as amount and depth of interaction, self-disclosure, etc. If an individual experiences apprehension about communicating with someone else, that individual is likely to avoid such an encounter if possible. If that someone else is an interviewer (low similarity, low self-esteem) for example, the results could be damaging. When the encounter cannot be avoided, it is likely that communication effectiveness would be low and that negative perceptions would befall the high SCA individual. These perceptions would reinforce the SCA, leading to a cyclically dysfunctional situation. The present authors feel that research in this area of communication apprehension is worthy of further investigation.

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Table 1

Intercorrelations

	Scam	Backsim	Attsim	Esteem	Taskatr	Phyatr
Backsim	.078					
Attsim	.192	.354				
Esteem	.629	.036	.264			
Taskatr	.068	.140	.478	.211		
Phyatr	.099	.181	.403	.151	.324	
Socatr	.285	.190	.723	.413	.470	.510

Table 2

Standardized Item Alpha Reliability Coefficients

Variable	# Items	Mean	Std.Dev.	Alpha
Scam	7	26.67	5.42	.871
Attsim	7	21.01	4.98	.885
Backsim	3	9.72	2.59	.801
Esteem	7	27.58	4.21	.850
Taskatr	10	35.96	6.78	.920
Phyatr	8	28.79	6.51	.932
Socatr	6	20.34	4.88	.895

Table 3

Initial Beta Weights

	Beta	F
Backsim	.129	1.549
Attsim	.136	4.539 *
Esteem	.829	175.695 *
Taskatr	-.467	1.190
Phyatr	-.198	21.651 *
(Constant)	7.074	

Table 4

Regression Summary

Variable	Beta	F
Esteem	.812	165.207
Phyatr	-.201	22.641
Atsim	.133	5.530

Multiple R = .66

Adjusted R^2 = .43

Table 5

Regression Analysis of Variance Summary

Analysis of Variance	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F
Regression	3	3366.297	1122.099	67.919
Residual	257	4245.941	16.521	

Appendix A

Descriptive Statistics

	Category	%		Category	%
1. AGE:	18 or younger	9.3	2. YEAR IN SCHOOL:	Frosh	3.1
	19	49.1		Soph	58.5
	20	25.3		Jr	27.3
	21	11.0		Sr	10.8
	22 or older	5.3		Grad	0.4
3. SUBJECT SEX:	Male	46.9	4. TARGET SEX:	Male	46.1
	Female	53.1		Female	53.9

5. LENGTH OF ACQUAINTANCE	%
less than one week	6.2
one week - one month	27.9
one month - one year	29.8
one year - two years	20.5
more than two years	15.5

Appendix B

Self-Esteem Scale

Situational Self-Esteem Items	Primary Loading	Highest Secondary Loading*
1. Sometimes I feel like a worthless individual when I am with this person.	.55297	.37351
2. I find that I dislike myself when I am with this person.	.62720	.27556
3. When I'm with this person, I feel so discouraged with myself that I wonder whether anything is worthwhile.	.67438	.14021
4. I usually feel like I've handled myself well around this person.	.53539	.27087
5. When I am with this person, I feel sure of myself.	.53613	.38928
6. I am confident of my abilities when I am with this person.	.60943	.31115
7. I like myself when I am with this person.	.57120	.30487

*In a principle components factor analysis (varimax rotation) with other variables in this study.

Appendix C

Situational Communication Apprehension Measure

1. When communicating with this person, I feel nervous.
2. When communicating with this person, I feel shy.
3. When communicating with this person, I feel intimidated.
4. When communicating with this person, I am afraid of what he/she will think of me.
*5. When I am talking to this person, I feel afraid or worried.
*6. I feel self-conscious when I am with this person.
*7. I am troubled with shyness around this person.
**8. I find it difficult to talk with this person.
**9. When communicating with this person, I feel relaxed.
**10. When communicating with this person, he/she makes me feel good.

* items generated in this study which loaded highly
** original SCAM items which did not load as well on this factor